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Contents

HOW TO...

Calibrate your LCD 205

Polish up your PC's screen in three easy steps

Create 3D images 206

Find out how taking photos above the clouds can bring another dimension to images

Make seamless tiles 207

A repeating pattern can be used to great effect if you know how to line things up

Use Excel's finance functions 208

Keep track of the interest on your savings

Print better photos 210

You may have a great printer and camera, but they're nothing without skill and a careful eye

Manage disk partitions 211

Divide and conquer with this month's cover disc

Break the rules 212

Have fun defying the laws of photography

Eradicate spyware 213

Stop unwanted programs keeping tabs on you

Hints and tips 213

Print web pages efficiently • Set the language in Word

HOW IT WORKS

Virtual private network 214

Mike James explains how the internet can be used to give remote users constant, secure access to a network, wherever they might be

ADVANCED WINDOWS

WiFi security 217

Wireless networking is faster and cheaper than ever before, and it is also incredibly easy to set up, but is it safe? Karl Wright explains how to tighten up the security of your WiFi connection

HOW TO... Calibrate your LCD

Make a few small changes to your screen and you'll see the benefits instantly. **Xavier Cortez** explains how to enhance LCD performance

Most of the monitors we review at *Computer Shopper* are capable of excellent image quality. However, many require a bit of tweaking to perform at their best. There are a number of techniques you can use to achieve this. This quick tutorial should help you see your LCD monitor in a whole new way.

1 Make sure your monitor is running at the correct resolution. This is the number of pixels that make up the image. LCDs will look sharp only if you run them at their native resolution. This is 1,024x768 for 15" models, 1,280x1,024 for 17" and 19" models, 1,600x1,200

for 20" and 21", and 1,280x768 for widescreen LCDs. To check your settings, right-click the desktop and select Display Properties. Click the Settings tab and adjust the 'Screen resolution' slider as necessary. Click OK and Yes to apply a setting.

2 If your display is attached via an analogue VGA cable, it should have an auto-adjust feature to line up the picture accurately, either in its onscreen display (OSD) or via a dedicated button. However, this doesn't always work perfectly; manual adjustment is sometimes required. Open your web browser and go to www.computershopper.co.uk/html/calibrate. Here, you'll

find a test screen with a number of elements. At the bottom is a cross-hatch pattern of black and white pixels, which will quickly tell you if the auto-adjust hasn't quite worked. If so, the picture will look like a hurricane of swirling patterns. To fix this, access your monitor's OSD and find the Phase control. Slowly adjust it until the test image becomes stable.

3 The other parts of this test image help you optimise your monitor's brightness and contrast. You should see three light-grey squares in the white area and three dark-grey squares in the black area. However, many monitors struggle to display this perfectly; they aren't able to differentiate the squares from their similarly coloured backgrounds. But this can usually be fixed with a bit of tweaking.

You'll probably find that the visibility of the squares varies depending on the angle at which you view them, so make sure you're sitting directly in front of your monitor. Then adjust your monitor OSD's brightness and contrast controls until you find the best settings to make the squares faintly visible. Some monitors won't be able to display the image properly. If this is the case, don't despair. It just means that you're losing some detail in the bright or dark parts of images, which isn't ideal if you use graphics software creatively. ☑

